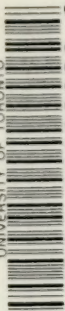
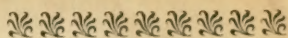


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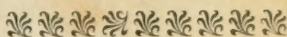
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A. J. YOUNG

THE ADVERSARY

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The Adversary

By the same Writer

Boaz and Ruth and Other Poems

The Death of Eli and Other Poems

Thirty-one Poems

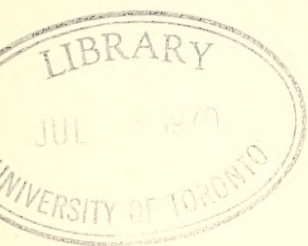
The Adversary

By
A. J. Young



London
John G. Wilson
350 Oxford Street, W. 1

John G. Wilson



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To my Mother

The Adversary

Part One : Morning

The scene is outside Job's House.

SATAN enters.

SATAN

Someone was up betimes building this altar ;
These bright-cut faggots are undarked by
dew ;

Hot kiss of torch will set them leaping in
flame.

Clearly Job intends an early sacrifice.

I have hit the moment :

I see the long gash of dawn in the sky ;

The stars are melting like a hasty rime.

The whole earth awakes, trees, birds and
insects ;

And Job awakes—to what ?

My sudden ear hears stirring in the house ;

A thread of light burns from under the door.

The matter now will come to a brief proof.

Does Job serve God for naught ?

His meekness, loud in men's ears, what is it ?

Sly beggar's cloak seeking an alms of God.

His charity—that lash of poor men's backs ?

Arrow aimed at a far-sighted target,

Casting of careful bread upon the waters.

But hush ! footsteps and drawing of a bolt ;

Here till they end their sacrifice

This tree will shade me from encroaching eyes.

The Adversary

JOB AND SERVANTS enter from the house.

JOB.

O sight for angels ! the sun's golden shears
Clipping the fleecy vapour from the slow hills.
Birds are loud awake already,
Whistling like rapid milk that sings in pails.
Bring leaves and straw ; set to the torch.

The fire is kindled.

JOB.

Thou Who didst slay the Dragon,
The deep sea-coiling Dragon,
And bind that foolish Huntsman,
The starry-sworded Orion,
In yoke of fruitful stars,
Glory to Thee, glory, glory.

SERVANTS.

Glory to God, glory, glory.

JOB.

O nightingales of Egypt,
That falling out of Egypt
Unload on our hills' springtime,

The Adversary

On flaming wharves of flowers,
Your cargo of sweet song,
Give to God glory, glory.

SERVANTS.

Glory to God, glory, glory.

JOB.

Leopards that leap from mountains,
Like cataracts from the mountains,
Dim wolves, night-faced hyenas
And long small-headed serpents
That suck the she-goat's milk,
Give to God glory, glory.

SERVANTS.

Glory to God, glory, glory.

JOB.

And all ye wavy fishes,
Both great and little fishes,
That curtained by green water
Do breathe strange pearl and amber
Under the deep sea,
Give to God glory, glory.

The Adversary

SERVANTS.

Glory to God, glory, glory.

The sacrifice is offered.

HYMN.

O Name unknown, O Word eternally unspoken,
Revered and feared and loved and more than all
adored,
From Whom the light of day as daily bread is broken,
Dawn and set of sun as milk and wine are poured :

Thou art the Lord of life, the Life and the Life-giver,
Breath of all living things that living live in Thee,
Bright air and flowery earth, field and flashing river,
Round sun and crumbling moon and time-observing
sea.

Giver of all gifts, we offer Thee thanksgiving,
Across their glorious dust marking Thy finger-
trace ;
But most of all for man, great miracle of living,
Whose frailer dust upholds a mirror to Thy face.

Servants go into the house.

The Adversary

JOB.

That man under the apple-tree ?
A beggar if his cloak speaks truth.
Beggar ? More like a wandering king,
One who still carries on his brow
The shadow of a fallen crown.
Closely he watched me ; watches me closely
still,
Silence the doubting threshold before he
speaks.

JOB approaches Satan.

Stranger, your eyes are asking me a question ;
Would telling of my name give you an answer ?

SATAN.

You, Job, I know, though unknown to you.

JOB.

Will you tell me whence you come ?

SATAN.

I come from going to and fro in the earth
And from walking up and down in it.

The Adversary

JOB.

Will you enter my house and rest ?
Will you sit down with me and eat bread ?

SATAN.

Neither I need :
I rest like the incessant waterfall
That sleeps in the steady thunder of its motion ;
Your food too, is it likely to serve my taste ?
My soul feeds on strong marrow from the
bone.

JOB.

I find your prelude strange.

SATAN.

Think well if the event prove no stranger.

JOB.

Tell me at least what it is you seek,
And why seeking it you have come to my
door.

SATAN.

Perhaps I come as much to give as to take ;
Getting and giving in some things are alike
So that one gets in the measure one gives.

The Adversary

JOB.

Can I think then that you are a merchant
From Saba, Arabia, Elam, or Egypt
Come here to trade in gums, stones or blue
pearls ?

SATAN.

I trade in things not bought or sold in
markets ;
Thoughts are more to me than sea-mined
pearls
Or any Arabian stones of kings
That can charm the trooping spirits of air ;
Men's tears are more to me than weeping
balsam
And crushed hearts more than opobalsamum.
But to narrow the matter now to a point :
I observe here your altar ;
I saw you offering a salted cake
And heard the song of your servants and
maid-servants.

JOB.

And what question would you make ?

SATAN.

I have travelled much ;

The Adversary

The world has been to me as a single path.
I have seen among men many strange customs:
Some think of God as a very old man,
Others think of Him as a warrior youth ;
Some worship Him even as a cow-horned
goddess,
Others again as the strange head of a cat.
Now this diversity of men's opinion
Has grown a burr that catches on my mind,
Is there any steadfast truth as can be known
Or is men's worship mere imagining.

JOB.

Are you a man that ask this of me a man ?
Have you no heart to give your heart an
answer ?
But none can speak for any but himself ;
One man may be to another as a foreign land
Different of speech and thought and custom,
As perhaps you are to me.

SATAN.

Did I not say so ?
Truth for men is variable as a star
Continually changing colour to the eye,

The Adversary

A rosy fire, a sapphire or a tear ;
And therein lies my doubt and question :
Men look on truth as their desire dictates,
Most filling their eyes with enchantment of
 moonlight,
Fearing to look at the snake-hatched cockatrice
That strikes with death.

JOB.

What man are you ?

SATAN.

Like truth I am a star,
Not changing instantaneous robes of light
Like any common star of the multitude ;
I am the solitary morning star,
The silver whisper of day's awakening ;
The first bird that shakes off her faltering
 dreams
And wakens others with her song.

JOB.

Stranger, if I take your meaning,
I am such an one as needs awaking,
A head-hung bird that feeds her heart on
 dreams.

The Adversary

SATAN.

Dreams hang in your mind like bats in a cave.

JOB.

I do not doubt but all things are a dream
Woven on the sleeping loom of creation ;
But intruding in men's dreams and causing
 them
Come broken fragments of truth like outside
 sounds
That agitate the dreams of sleeping men.

SATAN.

Would you be willing to wake now from
 sleep ?

JOB.

I wait the gentle shake of death. How else ?

SATAN.

By what I come to bring you and seek from
 you.

JOB.

The truth ? your truth ?

The Adversary

SATAN.

The truth that drives my blood as water a
wheel ;
That sends me out to pluck to flying pieces
The rich fabric of dreams that from themselves
Men continually spin like the Chinese worm.

JOB.

Do you not seek falsehood rather than truth ?

SATAN.

By seeking the falsehood I find the truth.
I prick all sky-reflecting bubbles
And let loose the empty nothing of air ;
I overturn the old mossy stones of custom
Uncrushing for men's eyes their crawling life.

JOB.

Your words have heat of unknown argument ;
They are like smoking springs
That rise out of dark sources in the earth.

SATAN.

True, my friend ; you have hit a surprising
truth.

The Adversary

I do not judge by the slender veils of sense,
By thin appearance flashing on the eye ;
I sink deep wells of thought ;
The truth I drink is filtered through the mind ;
I cannot drink like placid oxen
That muddy with their mouths the azure pool.

JOB.

A man can think too much,
More deeply than is good for life ;
To such thought becomes a disease.
Thought springs out of its value as a use ;
It cannot of itself judge what it serves.
Man lives by other things :
By the strong labour of his articulate hands,
By the glad earth and forgiving dawn
And the blossoming air that cages a thousand
birds ;
By love that knits the heart of man and man,
Man's faith in faith and hope for hope
And that believing that is God Himself.

SATAN.

You speak in broken sleep.
These things you speak of—faith, hope,
believing—

The Adversary

Dream of a dream !

The echo of a man's unanswered prayers ;
An unpromising rainbow painted on his tears ;
A thin mirage cast on life's emptiness.

JOB.

You look on life with dark obliquity,
The shadow of some hate, I know not what,
Eclipsing for your eyes the light of truth.
You cannot find the life by slaying it ;
Probing at the dead carcase of the truth
You miss the life, the breathing form, the
 beauty.

SATAN.

Beauty !

It is not beauty that I seek but truth,
And these two are adverse as water and fire.
Beauty is never truth ; it is the mask
With which men cover up the face of life,
Hiding the twisted shadow of its sin
And the slow burning of its frozen tears.
What lovely tale was ever yet told
Of all those timeless ages whose dead leaves
Are overgreen on poets' brows
Since the wild sunset of the morning world :
What tale of kings or white-browed queens ;

The Adversary

Of queens who changed their lovers with the
moon,
Or kings who dangled empires on their knees
But slipping once upon a little blood
Sleep a long night among the slippered dead ;
Or what sad tale of lovers who had drunk
Too deeply of each other's eyes to see
As others saw who slew them both in hate ;
What tale in all the world,
Tale that was true or was too true for truth,
Was not the tale of sorrow or of sin ?
And all such tales under their beauty's mask
Hide from the face of men the face of truth
That is too terrible and full of death
For living men to look upon and live.

JOB.

Stranger, your eyes are brighter than a bird's ;
And yet your face is sad as through you kept
The kisses of dead things on your lips.

SATAN.

These words I have spoken, are they fire or
wind ?

JOB.

Not knowing you I know not what you say.

The Adversary

SATAN.

What do you mean ?

JOB.

God's eyes reflect the truth, perfect and whole,
Man's darkly and in part ; what a man sees
Is partly truth and partly too the man ;
Therefore I say that by not knowing you
I do not know the truth of what you say.

SATAN.

When God made man He made a fool.

JOB.

But there are three men on their way here
now,
Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar : they are my friends
And wiser men than I—

SATAN.

Did you not bid me in your house ?

JOB.

If talking of other things—

The Adversary

SATAN.

Then lead the way.

For I can tell of wonders : snowy mountains
Mistaken for clouds among the clouds,
Where no bird's foot ever sets delicate arrow ;
Deserts so full of a great emptiness
That silence lies in them like sleeping thunder ;
Seas where men look on the black bones of
ships
Waving like wind-blown branches ; cities too,
Where honey-coloured men walking in
gardens
Blow kisses to the sun—

Satan walking behind Job flings off his cloak and renders himself invisible.

JOB.

What was that light ? You saw it, stranger,
The sudden light that flashed before us ?
Why, what is this ?
I see the house, the door, the steps, the trees ;
The stranger, has he gone ? gone like a dream ?
If this should be a dream ?
But no, I see his dark cloak lying there.
A mystery ?—Well let him go ;
I am not sorry he went by my door.

Job goes into the house.

The Adversary

SATAN.

And so with the off-flinging of my cloak
I leap into a density of light
Too shrill for mortal eyes. Pure flame again,
No weight of heavy blood withholds me now
To pass from here to earth's extremity
Moved by the simple impulse of my will.
But I have work to do with Job. So first,
As swiftly as a shooting star that lives
For a bright dying moment on the night
I rise to the angelic consistory,
Where God seated upon the heaped-up ages
That lie like drifts of everlasting snow
Still chides His angels charging them with
folly
And ponders with the frown of mountainous
brows
This ball of trembling dust men call the earth ;
And if I find my will at one with His,
Then Job, ah Job !
For I going about to do my Master's will
Shall come again close on the fall of night.

Part Two : Evening

The scene is as before.

SATAN enters.

SATAN.

He said that at my fall
A tear fell from the great Father's face
On heaven's burning pavement ; such a tear
Might compass the salvation of a world,
And yet it scalds my heart. I am content ;
I could not be another than myself
To abdicate the kingdom of my mind,
No, though I were to die
Breaking my heart on my unbroken will.
Ah, I see a thing !
A mystery, a shadow on the ground.
It moves ; I cannot shake it from my feet.
Is it my SHADOW ?
But how can I, a spirit compact of light,
Suffer eclipse and trail a mortal shade ?
Michael spoke truth :
"Satan, thy throne is quenched," he said,
"God's sons go sighing past it."
So it was not for nothing the noon sun,
Obstructed by the interloping moon,
Grew visibly dark in mutilated light,
And men who saw the shadowing hand of God

The Adversary

Stared at their own fear in their neighbours' faces.

But I, knowing the cause of things, cannot know fear ;

And if I am forbid to pass this sun

That bathes with blossoming light earth's upturned face,

Here I remain,

Constant always to men as their own shadow,

Spreading the swift contagion of my thought,

Proclaiming in ways as various as the wind

That adorable goodness sits not on heaven's throne.

That truth like a wild beast leaping from my lips

Shall work such havoc in the slow flocks of men,

That God at last shall confess failure,

And tearing this written legend of creation

Drop it piece by piece into forgetful silence.

First messenger enters.

SATAN.

Ah, a thief ?

FIRST MESSENGER.

No, sir, a hind, one of Job's servants.

The Adversary

SATAN.

What news do you bring that brings you here?

FIRST MESSENGER.

The oxen were ploughing and the asses feeding
And we were with them in the field ;
We looked for nothing,
Till looking up we saw a cloud of dust.
It blew towards us from the desert
With the shaking thud of camels' feet ;
We saw bright spears in the sun
And faces of black men with snowy teeth
And ear-rings tinkling in the wind—

SATAN.

In brief,
Your fellow-hinds were slain and you escaped
And those Sabeen warriors are richer
By certain scores of oxen and she-asses
And Job is so much poorer.
Go now and tell this to your master.

First messenger goes into the house.

SATAN.

A man has nothing, neither goods nor children,
But what he borrows from the lender, Fate ;

The Adversary

He pays dear interest of daily care,
He robs his sleep, his peace of mind to pay
it,
Yet knows that any hour the hour may strike
When he shall give all back, his best and
dearest,
And in the end be left life's bankrupt.

Second messenger enters.

SECOND MESSENGER.

What man are you ?

SATAN.

I am an astrologer.

SECOND MESSENGER.

What man is that ?

SATAN.

One who can cast the stars.

SECOND MESSENGER.

Could you say something to my profit ?

The Adversary

SATAN.

Two silver shekels chinking in my hand
Sing like the nightingale.
Find me here when it is dark.
Come now, what news do you bring to Job?

SECOND MESSENGER.

It chanced I went across the hill for water
Leaving the herdsmen with the sheep and
 camels
Locked in a narrow glen ;
As I came back on the other side of the hill,
I felt my face pricked by a sudden heat ;
I heard a nimble crackling of thorns and
 thistles ;
Then at my feet a serpent—

SATAN.

Ah, caught in the trap
Your fellow-herdsmen and their cattle
Were no more to that blind-eyed fury of fire
Than other snakes, mice, lizards, scorpions,
That perished too.
Go ; enjoy the pleasure of telling evil tidings.

Second messenger goes into the house.

The Adversary

SATAN.

I have a fear for Job ; the man is old
And stands supported like the Indian tree
By his own branches that have taken root ;
I fear the next axe hewing at the props
May bring the old trunk with them.

Third messenger enters.

THIRD MESSENGER.

O God, the sight that I have seen !
I see it still :
The whirlwind from the desert,
The dancing pillars of dust,
The swaying house, the rent of bulging walls,
The twisted limbs, the flowers, the wine, the
blood—
They are all dead, they are all dead.

Third messenger goes into the house.

SATAN.

Is it too much ?
What if so great a gust should blow clean out
The weak flame sheltered in that earthen
lamp ?

There is a pause. Then Job with a cry comes running from the house and falls at the altar.

The Adversary

SATAN.

He does not move.

Can I have feared too well?

O God, is it Thy spite to let this man

Make easy passage into death by prayer?

Satan approaches Job.

Is there a heart that measures its slow time

Within the flooded prison of those ribs

And like a captive tramping in his cell

Limps on across vast continents of pain?

Is it the breathing body of a man

That kneels there at that deaf indifferent altar,

Giving and taking air to keep alive

The working lungs and the incessant heart,

Each speaking pulse and that self-seeing light

That dwells between the eyeballs and the
brain?

Or has death set his cobwebs on those eyes

And with a shut-in gloom and gathering dust

Darkened the inward pictures of the mind,

So that what once was man is such no longer

But something less than the night-loving
moth

That shall survive him till the setting moon?

JOB.

Oh, oh!

The Adversary

SATAN.

He lives ; that was a sigh that slipped his lips
Like a thin bubble from a drowning man.

JOB.

O let me die and let this be the end ;
Let not the torture of a new day's light
That wakens others waken me.

SATAN.

He rises, stretching hands in a blind prayer
As though to embrace the empty form of God.

JOB.

Ask not that I should take this burden up ;
I cannot lift it ; its bewildering weight
Crushes me like a world.

SATAN.

He staggers like a tree that feels the axe
Deep at its roots. Now with this man, this
child,
This aged child that looks as old as God,
Have I to wrestle.

JOB.

Friend, lend me your hand.

The Adversary

SATAN.

You know me ?

JOB.

Ah, the stranger.

SATAN.

And your friend.

JOB.

I thank you if you are ; my grief is great,
My grief is more than I can bear.

SATAN.

Tell me, is this thing true I hear ?

JOB.

I cannot speak it ; what you hear is true.

SATAN.

Servants and cattle in one day destroyed ?

JOB.

That too is true ; I had forgot it.

The Adversary

SATAN.

Then learn, my friend, to find in what is left
The greater blessing. You have your
 children still,
And therein lies your world.
For love though tender as a tear or dewdrop
Can be as hard as diamond to resist
The world's worst hurt or envy.

JOB.

Oh !

SATAN.

Why do you cry ?

JOB.

My sons and daughters !

SATAN.

What of them ?

JOB.

I slay them all a second time to tell it.

SATAN.

Speak ; am I not your friend ?

The Adversary

JOB.

They feasted in their elder brother's house ;
A whirlwind, a great whirlwind from the desert,
Smiting the corners of the house—
And they are dead, dead, all dead.

SATAN.

Your children dead ? your sons and daughters
dead ?
Slain by the hand of God ?
And not one left to keep your name alive
And save your blood from running to an end ?
O that is the last evil of all evil,
When the flame dies down on the household
hearth
And the oil is spent in the cruse.

JOB.

Have pity on me, O my friend, have pity.

SATAN.

A man's footsteps are blind from birth to
death :
As man is blindly born and blindly goes
To death's strong-posted door, so all between

The Adversary

Is blindness ; for O how blindly you have
walked
To set your foot in this flower-smothered trap.

JOB.

A trap ?

SATAN.

The fox, O Job, what of the trap-caught fox ?
The iron teeth are fixed ; they bite like fire ;
It drags a blood-stained track across the hills,
As you must drag—

JOB.

O God, have pity on me.

SATAN.

The sheep, the goat, the rat, the toad, the
snake,
Tortured by imminent death, move man to pity,
But man move God—?

JOB.

God's ways are dark.

The Adversary

SATAN.

The darkness is in man, in man himself ;
The bowed head and self-blinded eyes of prayer
Make all the darkness.

JOB.

You are God's enemy.

SATAN.

And if I am, I am the more man's friend.

JOB.

God's enemy is not my friend.

SATAN.

Will you still pray to this child-slaying God ?
Did He not slay your children ?
Break them like playthings, fling them in the
fire,
Beat them like singing locusts from the vines ?

JOB.

And you, what would you have me do ?

The Adversary

SATAN.

A man can act by his indwelling light,
That whisper of the truth that makes him man,
Not like the blind-eyed beast that sees a spot ;
Man has a more discerning gift
To take life or refuse it as he will.

JOB.

What do you hint at ?

SATAN.

A wise man who has drunk of life's top
sweetness
Will fling away the dregs.

JOB.

You hint at death ?

SATAN.

Death is the sacrifice man pays for life,
Requital of sin and seal of lasting peace.

JOB.

O if it might be, how sweetly would my body
Mingle with death in his promiscuous bed
And crumble back into slow earth.

The Adversary

SATAN.

Is it not one act ? one swift sudden act ?

JOB.

With self-destroying hand ?

SATAN.

That way at least is open ;
A man can make one safe escape from life
Cleaving a desperate passage through his heart
And winning death's invulnerable tower.

JOB.

To slay the body, is it to slay death ?
No, death is God's gift ;
Now should we snatch it, setting in one
balance
His will and ours, a breath against a wind,
A stream choked by a rising sea ?

SATAN.

What is it that you fear ?

The Adversary

JOB.

I fear to kill the God that dwells within.
I fear too with some reason ;
For if man's soul can be so fugitive
That in his sleep which is death's breathing
image
Strange forms of terror can intrude to lift him
To fiery wrestlings in the heat of dreams,
To what strange lands beyond this hiding sun
His spirit loosened from the blood-locked
body
May by death's winds be blown
To face unknown and spectral forms of sin ?

SATAN.

Is it then with such wild words as these—?

JOB.

Not wilder at least than your spray-spattering
words.

SATAN.

O were you less of man and more of woman !

JOB.

What do you mean ?

The Adversary

SATAN.

A woman has too piercing sight to blind ;
Give her her children, she has God enough,
But take her children and you take her God.
In woman's heart the lioness and lamb
Lie down together ; lay hand on the lamb,
The blood-hoarse lioness will start.

JOB.

You are a man one might have cause to fear.

SATAN.

O Job, were I as you,
In whom God's bloody knife has cut so deep,
What prayers would I make that this same
God,
Who sits now like a mountain on His throne,
Might tumble down, a dead world on the world,
And I
Like a wild prophetess under her tree
Might sing to Him my sweet love-hymn of
hate.

JOB.

Silence !

I will not hear you further ; these words you
speak

The Adversary

Have a more dreadful sound than the black
wind
That brought the house down on my children's
ruin.
Enough is said ; more than enough is said.
If you have come, if you have sought me out,
As it appears, to tempt me from my God,
You come too late.

SATAN.

Too late ?

JOB.

Death is the price we pay at last for life.
Is it too great a price ?
If I have purchased at the price of death
The gift of those dear children that I loved,
Richer before, I am no poorer now.

SATAN.

What gift is there to take where one has given ?

JOB.

In what remains, the very pain of love,
That teaches us the greatness of the gift,
Not to be changed for any lesser joy.
But, stranger,
This is no house to ask a guest to enter ;
There is one here that bids us be alone—

The Adversary

SATAN.

Are you a man ?

JOB.

I am a man,
Not less nor more ; dust of the earth indeed,
But a strange dust blown by the breath of God.

SATAN.

God !
What do you know, what can you know of
God ?
Is it from earth, green-gushing spring or
autumn,
The stars or the cold cruelty of the sun,
Or that white moon baring her milkless bosom,
You draw this ineradicable dream ?

JOB.

No, but from where close by the heart of God
Man's heart can lie apart and listen and know.
Friend, you have come too late ; you should
have come
Not now, but in my better happier days.

The Adversary

My love for God, my love for them, my
children,
Was one ; with one half gone, by so much
more
I need the other.
Forgive me if I close the door.
Farewell.

Job goes into the house.

SATAN.

When God made man He made a fool.
O God, bend down Thy star-reflecting eyes
And single out this world among all worlds
And see this Job, a man after Thy heart.
For me it is enough.
O must it ever be that God and man
Shall strive together and that Chance with both
Shall strive, and there shall be no end ? For one
Shall lose, and that is neither God nor Chance,
But man. Therefore I pity this man, Job ;
Pity all men indeed ; though there is good,
Mingled with greater evil in man's life,
This may at least be said : man wakes too late,
Sleeping through happiness, waking at evil,
To see the happiness he missed ; as now

The Adversary

From that black rose-tree the night-sheltered
bird

Awakes too late and mourns to see the day
Embalmed like a dead queen in barks and spice
Breathe odours on the air, while silent night
Nails down her coffin with a thousand stars.

Rizpah

Argument.

For three years there has been a drought in the land of Israel. Inquiring of the Lord, David learns it is on account of Saul's massacre of the Gibeonites. He asks the Gibeonites what atonement can be made, and they demand the death of seven of Saul's sons. Accordingly these seven men are sacrificed at Gibeon, and their bodies hung from a tree till the rain shall give the sign that atonement has been made. Rizpah, the mother of two of them, watches by the dead bodies throughout the summer, driving off the wild beasts and birds. The poem begins after the first rain has fallen.

The scene is the hill behind Gibeon. There is an altar-stone and a tree from which hang the bodies of Saul's seven sons. Rizpah sits under the tree. The Chorus, women of her house, have come from Gibeon of Benjamin to take her home. It is night when they arrive, having climbed the hill.

Chorus enters.

SEMI-CHORUS I.

Which way, sisters, which way ?

SEMI-CHORUS II.

No way is here.

SEMI-CHORUS I.

The track ?

SEMI-CHORUS II.

Slipped like a snake from eye and foot.

SEMI-CHORUS I.

Stumble we all night on the hill ?

SEMI-CHORUS II.

What hope,
Unless the moon appearing shoot a shaft ?

Rizpah

SEMI-CHORUS I.

A sign, a sign ! See where she gores the clouds,
The cow-horned one.

SEMI-CHORUS II.

O happy blossom of light !

SEMI-CHORUS I.

Sidonian women offer raisin cakes
To twin-horned Ashtaroth.

SEMI-CHORUS II.

Good words, good words ;
The Stone of God is here, the great Stone of
God.

SEMI-CHORUS I.

The Stone anointed by the filial blood.

SEMI-CHORUS II.

What blood ?

SEMI-CHORUS I.

Of Rizpah's two and Merab's five.

SEMI-CHORUS II.

The Stone has ears ; silence is best for all.

Rizpah

SEMI-CHORUS I.

O God !

SEMI-CHORUS II.

Why do ye cry ? what have ye seen ?

SEMI-CHORUS I.

Lift up your eyes.

SEMI-CHORUS II.

To what, to what ?

SEMI-CHORUS I.

The tree !

O heavy sight that breaks the moon.

SEMI-CHORUS II.

What tree ?

SEMI-CHORUS I.

The tree whose roots are as earth-cleaving
serpents

Striking to hell to bear upon its branches

This sevenfold fruit of death.

Rizpah

SEMI-CHORUS II.

O that my hands
Could pluck the fruit of this forbidden tree,
A fruit too ripe, too ripe ; but it is death
By stoning or by sword—

SEMI-CHORUS I.

Look what is here ;
This is no stone, it is a crouching woman.
Rizpah !

SEMI-CHORUS II.

Asleep ?

SEMI-CHORUS I.

Too deep for voice to waken.

SEMI-CHORUS II.

O is she dead, the mother of dead children ?

SEMI-CHORUS I.

What shall we do, what shall we women do ?

SEMI-CHORUS II.

Sit we by her and mourn and mourn and
mourn.

Rizpah

SEMI-CHORUS I.

Uncover not the sackcloth from her face ;
I fear to look on the dead woman's face,
Sitting alone in the moon's bright danger.

CHORUS.

Was it for this we wove a crown
Of saffron and sweet-smelling dill
And led her through the clamorous town
With sound of flute and smoking torch,
The self-vowed victim, willing thrall,
A snow-white heifer of the hill,
And brought her to the rose-clad porch,
The shouts of men and the lighted house
of Saul ?

The smoke was blindness to our eyes,
Our ears were deaf with the sounding
flute,
The cries of men and the women's cries,
Or we had slain her where she stood,
Plucking from the deep-browed door
The heavy lintel ere her foot
Stept on the flowers that bright as blood
Lay in a dazzling pool upon the floor.

RIZPAH.

O woe, woe !

Rizpah

CHORUS.

Someone speaks, who is it speaks ?
A living voice ? a death-tied tongue ? I fear,
Greatly I fear, knowing not what to fear.

RIZPAH.

Go from me, ye that wake the dead.

CHORUS.

Rizpah !
Is it not Rizpah's voice ? She lives, she lives ;
Her sleep was but the overwork of grief.
And see, her face unclouding like the moon,
As lost and dead and patient as the moon.

RIZPAH.

O is it ye, the women of my house ?

CHORUS.

Thou seest us, thou knowest us.

RIZPAH.

Alas,
Why have ye come ? what do ye seek ?

Rizpah

CHORUS.

O Rizpah,
Girding our robes in haste, we came this day
From Gibeah.

RIZPAH

And why ? what have ye heard ?

CHORUS.

The rain crying with shrill voice from the
ground.

RIZPAH.

The rain, the rain, what to me is the rain ?

CHORUS.

Heaven shed sweet tears of pity in the rain.

RIZPAH.

My eyes were sooner kinder to my sorrow.

CHORUS.

Men shouted, hearing the reluctant rain.

RIZPAH.

They shouted, but I raise no joyful shout ;
For they have vines and olives, but for me
The fruit hangs black and withered on the
bough.

What hope is in the rain ?

Rizpah

CHORUS.

Trusting the rain
Had washed from these dead bodies of thy
sons
The shadow of the blood that cursed the earth,
We came.

RIZPAH.

And have I not shed tears enough
To loose from earth the fastest-clinging curse ?
And whence is this blood-shadow ? Blood met
blood ;
If so be that Saul wrought a deed of blood
His house has given a piteous bloody answer.

CHORUS.

No question make we one way or another ;
It is the hate of Gibeon is strong.

RIZPAH.

The hate of Gibeon is beyond all hate ;
Savage destroyers of the dead, they shoot
Across death's boundary a poisonous arrow
At the unburied dead, pursuing hate
To endless end.

Rizpah

CHORUS.

O was it for Gibeon,
Who tricked him with the tale of mouldy bread,
That Joshua bade the sun and moon stand still
Over the Amorites in Ajalon
And shut the five kings in a living tomb,
Hanging their bodies after in the sun?

RIZPAH.

And I through a long summer, sun and moon,
Keep watch by these dead bodies of my sons,
Driving the obscene beasts and bitter birds.

CHORUS.

Evil, thrice-evil race of Gibeon !
And what of those two with pretence of wheat,
Who passed the sleeping portress at her mill
And slew at noon the young king on his bed,
Whose spear-borne head was laid in Abner's
tomb?

RIZPAH.

But one I hate more than all Gibeon.

CHORUS.

Whom more than all Gibeon dost thou hate?

RIZPAH.

David.

Rizpah

CHORUS.

O lay thy hand upon thy mouth
If thou wouldst speak of him, the Lord's
anointed.

RIZPAH.

Anointed by what oil ?

CHORUS.

From Samuel's horn.

RIZPAH.

No fragrant oil of myrrh and calamus
Anointed Jesse's son.

CHORUS.

How so, how so ?

RIZPAH.

Too bitter was the smell.

CHORUS.

Then say what oil.

RIZPAH.

The blood of Saul's seven sons.

Rizpah

CHORUS.

What dost thou hint ?

RIZPAH.

He slew them at the mere excuse of rain,
Not by his own hand but by Gibeon,
That safer he might ride their father's throne.

CHORUS.

One son he spared at least, young Mephibosheth

RIZPAH.

Lame on both legs ! a lame man for a king !

CHORUS.

O Rizpah, not for strife of words we came.

RIZPAH.

Why have ye come ?

CHORUS.

We came to take thee hence
To eat thy bread once more among the living.

RIZPAH.

My tears are sweeter while I watch the dead.

Rizpah

CHORUS.

Thou wilt not come then ?

RIZPAH.

Here beneath this tree
My grief has taken root, and like the night shade
Brings forth its poisoned berries ; day and
 night
I eat that fruit, living by my own pain.

CHORUS.

This rain has opened graves for thy dead sons.

RIZPAH.

When they go back to Gibeah, I go.

CHORUS.

Thou wilt not come ?

RIZPAH.

Shall I forsake the dead ?
Their spirits haunt these leafy trees, by day
Hanging like light-dazed bats, but at nightfall
Fluttering to and fro in the brown air,
Crying for easeful burial.

Rizpah

CHORUS.

Is this the end ?

RIZPAH.

It is the end ? no further word I speak.

CHORUS.

They say that under this sacred Stone,
Raised by the Zuzim and Zamzummin,
Giant pest-peoples that lived of old,
Crouches a maiden unnamed, unknown,
Bending forward, chin upon knees,
Locked together limb to limb,
A victim buried alive to appease
The Baal that gives increase to corn-field
and sheep-fold.

Woe for the luckless lot of her,
The girdled girl, unwooed, unwon,
Lying alone in her straitened bed,
With apples unplucked and no sweet
myrrh
Scenting her skirts with borrowed breath;
But woe for the heavier lot of one,
A woman wed to incestuous death,
That labours in second pangs to bear the
unborn dead.

Rizpah

SEMI-CHORUS I.

What are those dancing lights ?

SEMI-CHORUS II.

They climb the hill.

SEMI-CHORUS I.

Wild beasts with eyes like wandering stars,
Hyenas, wolves or jackals ?

SEMI-CHORUS II.

Dawn is near ;
I hear the rapid noise of birds.

SEMI-CHORUS I.

Nay, lamps,
That dart sharp questions at a doubtful way.

SEMI-CHORUS II.

Hither ?

SEMI-CHORUS I.

So seems it, and I hear men's voices.

SEMI-CHORUS II.

What cause have we to fear ?

Rizpah

SEMI-CHORUS I.

The event will show,
And soon.

SEMI-CHORUS II.

One man I see who leads the rest ;
He beckons back his following and comes.
O do I dream ?

SEMI-CHORUS I.

Nay, it is he, the king.

King David enters with Attendants.

DAVID.

Who are ye women gathered at this tree ?
I scan your faces, but the face I seek,
I see not. Are ye silent ?

CHORUS.

O great king—

DAVID.

Say on.

CHORUS.

I am a reed, shaken by wind.

Rizpah

DAVID.

What dost thou fear ?

CHORUS.

The swift gust of thy presence.

DAVID.

Fear no such fear. Come I with ill intent ?

CHORUS.

How can I know ?

DAVID.

Should I then come myself ?

A king has in his servants a long arm
To do a needful evil. Fear not, but say,
Ye are her women surely, where is Rizpah.

CHORUS.

She looks at thee, O king.

DAVID.

That crouching stare
That seems about to spring ? O never think
Thou hast a cockatrice's eye to kill ;

Rizpah

I bear upon my breast a righteous gem
Against enchantingeye. And art thou Rizpah,
The watcher by this empty tomb of air,
The mother who has nursed these seven dead
men

Through the dark summer heat ? Thou wilt
not speak ?

Why then on my side is no cause to speak.
But I have charm for the deaf adder's ear ;
Speak thou for me, my sword ; both deaf and
dead

Shall hear the seven sharp words that thou
shalt speak.

CHORUS.

O wilt thou slay her ?

DAVID.

Nay, I slay her hate.

CHORUS.

How, how ?

DAVID.

Cutting these bodies from the tree.

Rizpah

RIZPAH.

Jackals, wolves, foxes, kites and bearded vultures
Have I with crying hands through summer
vigil
Kept from these bodies ; but now springs a
beast,
A fouler and more carrion-loving monster,
Waving death in his sword. O women, women,
Share with me the shrill pleasure of my death,
Fighting to save these dead.

DAVID.

Be silent, sword ;
Thou hast too sharp an edge of speech ;
sleep thou,
Imbedded in thy sheath. With softer words
This box, opening its dumb mouth, will speak.
Ye watching women I address ; come hither ;
Look ye ; see what is here, say what ye see.

CHORUS.

What, what ? how can I tell ?

DAVID.

Touch not these bones.

Rizpah

CHORUS.

O do I look on fire-burned bones ?

DAVID.

The ashes
Dug from the tree at Ramoth-Gilead.

CHORUS.

Of Saul and Jonathan ?

DAVID.

All but the head
Hung with the armour in Astarte's temple.

RIZPAH.

What do I hear ?

DAVID.

What thou canst see.

RIZPAH.

O God !

DAVID.

These are the dead bones of thy husband, Saul,
And Jonathan, his son, who was my friend,
Reduced by fire.

Rizpah

RIZPAH.

O woe is me, O woe !

CHORUS.

See, she bends over them with weeping hair.

DAVID.

One tear at least thou sparest from thy sons
To fall on these poor bones ; I too shed tears
Over that silver dust. Tear has met tear ;
Our tears have touched, thy tear and mine ;
O Rizpah,
Have we not in this mingling of our tears
Together made a covenant of salt ?

CHORUS.

O mistress, O dear mother, give good heed.

RIZPAH.

Am I now in a dream, a slippery dream,
Twixt sleep and waking ?

DAVID.

Put thou forth thy hand.

Rizpah

CHORUS.

Ask thou of him ; for me, I fear to ask.

RIZPAH.

What should I ask ? I know not what to ask.

CHORUS.

Why he unyoked the power of these dead
bones ?

RIZPAH.

The hand was rash.

CHORUS.

Or the intent was good.

DAVID.

Father and sons shall sleep within one tomb.

CHORUS.

I see a ray of hope.

RIZPAH.

In Gibeon ?

Rizpah

DAVID.

Better that tree, their growing sepulchre
At Ramoth-Gilead.

RIZPAH.

Where then ?

DAVID.

In Zelah.

RIZPAH.

The tomb of Kish ?

DAVID.

Saul's father.

RIZPAH.

This thou swearest ?

DAVID.

My oath shall be the stone that seals their tomb.

CHORUS.

Rejoice, Rizpah, rejoice ; we too rejoice.

RIZPAH.

Was it for this thou camest ?

Rizpah

DAVID.

Swift as rain.

RIZPAH.

Yet thou didst let them die ?

DAVID.

At word of God.

RIZPAH.

Who sent the drought.

DAVID.

And the releasing rain.

RIZPAH.

If what thou sayest is in truth the truth,
My steps shall go along with these dead men.

DAVID.

Then out, my sword, and speak ; nay, sing a
song
For Rizpah's ear, neither too harsh nor sweet.

King David cuts down the bodies from the tree.

SEMI-CHORUS I.

Is it an airy dream
Or some enchantment I behold :
A vapour from the cold
Ox-horned, malignant moon,

Rizpah

Or phantasy that soon
Will shrivel like a sunbow on a stream ?

SEMI-CHORUS II.

I feel as though a wand
Thrice had waved before my eyes,
And this wizardry that dyes
The alien light of day
Would swiftly shrink away
And vanish at the waking of my hand.

CHORUS.

From Jesse's rod there sprang a stem,
(Rejoice, rejoice, O Bethlehem,)
A stem, a sapling and an oak,
(Rejoice with harp and dulcimer,)
Tossing in tempestuous smoke,
Scattering stars and thunder from his hair.
(Let us rejoice, rejoice with them
Who sing aloud for Bethlehem.)

Crowned with a star-set diadem,
(Be glad, be glad, O Bethlehem,)
O see that stem of Jesse stand,
(Raise a glad shout and bend the knee,)
Lifting his rod across the land,
Shaking a flowery sceptre on the sea.
(Let us be glad, be glad with them
Who sing aloud for Bethlehem.)

PR Young, Andrew
6047 The adversary
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